

Chickenpox

What is chickenpox?

Chickenpox is a very contagious rash illness caused by the varicella zoster virus. It occurs most frequently in the winter and early spring. Once a person gets chickenpox, they will generally not get it again.

Who gets chickenpox?

Chickenpox is very common in the United States. Almost everyone who is not vaccinated acquires chickenpox by adulthood. It is most common in children under 15 years old.

What are the symptoms of chickenpox?

Initial symptoms include the sudden onset of slight fever and feeling tired and weak. These are soon followed by an itchy, blister-like rash. The blisters eventually dry, crust over, and form scabs. The rash may first appear on the upper body, then arms, legs, and face.

Mild or inapparent infections occasionally occur in children. The disease is usually more serious in adults than in children.

How is chickenpox spread?

Chickenpox spreads from person to person by direct contact or by airborne spread of droplets from the nose, throat, or mouth through sneezing or coughing. It can also spread by contact with items freshly soiled by discharges from an infected person's blisters, nose, or mouth.

A person with chickenpox is contagious 1-2 days before the rash begins and until all blisters have formed scabs. Illness usually lasts 5 to 10 days. It takes 10 to 21 days after exposure to chickenpox for someone to develop the illness.

How common is chickenpox?

Before the introduction of the varicella vaccine in 1995, almost everyone was infected by adulthood. Since the introduction of the vaccine, chickenpox has declined dramatically in the United States.

What is the treatment for chickenpox?

If you think you have chickenpox, see your health care provider for treatment recommendations. There is an antiviral drug that could help with the treatment, but most doctors do not prescribe it for healthy people. Other treatments include rest and plenty of fluids. Tylenol can be used to reduce fever and discomfort (do not treat children with aspirin since there is a possible complication that can occur). Do not rub off scabs as it could cause scarring and infection. Cut fingernails short and keep them clean to reduce infection from scratching. Calamine lotion and colloidal oatmeal baths may help relieve

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some of the itching.

Are there complications from chickenpox?

Newborn children whose mothers have had onset of chickenpox between 5 days before and 2 days after delivery or patients with leukemia may suffer severe, prolonged, or fatal chickenpox. People with suppressed immune systems have an increased risk of developing a severe form of chickenpox. Reye's syndrome is a potentially serious complication associated with chickenpox involving those children who have been treated with aspirin, therefore never give aspirin to a child infected with chickenpox.

Serious complications from chickenpox include dehydration, pneumonia, infection or inflammation of the brain, blood stream infections, and bone and joint infections. Some people with serious complications from chickenpox can become so sick that they need to be hospitalized. Chickenpox can cause death.

How can chickenpox be prevented?

People infected with chickenpox should be kept at home to limit the risk of transmitting the virus to others.

The chickenpox vaccine is recommended for persons 12 months and older and for older children who have never had the chickenpox. Most people who get chickenpox vaccine will not get chickenpox. But if someone who has been vaccinated *does* get chickenpox, it is usually very mild. They will have fewer spots, are less likely to have a fever, and will recover faster.

How do I get more information on chickenpox?

Calhoun County Public Health Department

Phone: (269) 969-6383

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Website: <http://www.cdc.gov/chickenpox/about/overview.html>

Phone: 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636)

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This fact sheet is meant to provide general health information and is not intended to be medical advice or otherwise take the place of your doctor's orders or to diagnose your specific health problems. Check with your doctor if you have any questions or concerns about your health.

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